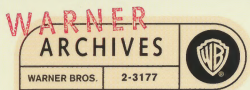


BILL EVANS/NEW CONVERSATIONS

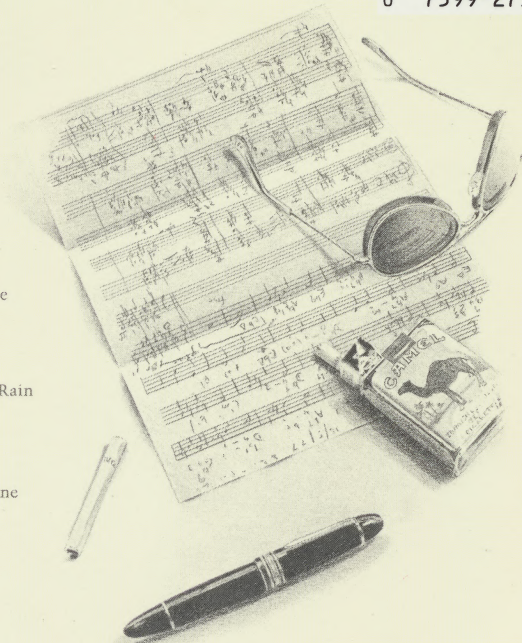


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1. Song For Helen
2. Nobody Else But Me
3. Maxine
4. For Nenetie
5. I Love My Wife
6. Remembering The Rain
7. After You
8. Reflections In D

Produced by Helen Keane
First released in 1978



Certain names—reflecting particularly intense identities in sound—have reached clear across the world. Bill Evans, for example, whose lyrical imagination and marvelously resilient beat is celebrated in Japan, Russia, France, South America, and anywhere else ageless jazz improvisation is an essential, energizing part of certain people's lives.

Evans has become so deeply influential a force in jazz by sheer force of integrity. More than considerable talent was also required, of course, but the extraordinary power of his music comes from ceaseless self-exploration. That is, Evans keeps developing his technique—and his ear—so that, as he puts it, more and more of what's inside him can get through his hands onto the piano.

Precisely because of the discipline Bill Evans brings to his playing, the result is emotionally penetrating. And so it is that crowded rooms become quiet when he plays, for Bill is speaking from so far inside himself that his music often moves listeners in ways they are not accustomed to being moved. Listening to him, as on this album, is an experience that remains distinct in memory.

It's like the joining of autobiographies, for you find the music suddenly stirring feelings of your own that have long been hibernating.

Although Bill is more often heard in a trio setting, it is as a solo pianist that he is most strongly, and sometimes mysteriously, evocative. And as a solo pianist, he has been developing ways in which to extend his voice and ideas. Through multi-tracking, Bill began with the Grammy-winning *Conversations With Myself*, which was followed by *Further Conversations With Myself*. Now, in his first Warner Bros. album, *New Conversations*, Bill has further perfected these multiple monologues and created a ceaselessly absorbing mosaic that reveals his continued growth as a passionately thoughtful improviser.

As you will hear, Bill does not let the technology of multi-tracking dominate him in the least. This is a thoroughly *musical*, not at all mechanical, achievement. All the voices are organically intertwined, the creative impulse coming wholly from Bill, not the technicians.

Evans manifestly enjoys playing with a group, but these interior conversations present a different, and in some ways, more satisfying challenge. "Playing by myself," he says, "I'm able to project my personal feelings more strongly. With a group, you have to bend and mix, and that can lead to very satisfying experiences, but you don't get as deeply into the essence of who you are as in

a solo performance. Then too, though there are interludes of straight-ahead jazz, you can be more rhapsodic, more orchestral, more free in solo work."

From subtle standards to a series of remarkably luminous Bill Evans originals, this set reinforces the singular place of Bill Evans in the jazz field. Jazz is a way of playing, he has said, that is "the purest tradition in music this country has had. It has never bent to strictly commercial considerations, and so it has made music for its own sake. That's why I'm proud to be part of it."

The spirit of jazz is free, coming out of hard dues. The same can be said of Bill Evans.

—Nat Hentoff, 1978

This series of unexpectedly interconnecting conversations is sometimes in triologue form, at other times a dialogue, and on one track, a monologue. I doubt if any other pianist in jazz could have made this so sustainedly absorbing and continually fresh a speaking in simultaneous tongues. For that matter, even when he is not multi-tracking, Bill Evans is one of the few pianists who commands total attention in solo performance. His strengths include the ability to create uncommonly inventive melodic variations while underneath, his time not only flows but actually seems to breathe. This is no one-dimensional swinger.

Also, there is Evans' harmonic imagination which leads to textures—sound-colors—that bring new dimensions to jazz piano. In a way it's like finding a novelist who does more than tell a story—he makes you feel the weather, see a room from the inside, hear the voices of the characters. So Evans not only sounds the time and spins the melody, but he also gives each piece a particularity—a depth of color—and a center of emotional gravity that make many other pianists sound rather thin by comparison.

The song "I Love My Wife" by Cy Coleman—from the Broadway musical of the same title— involves two pianos, both acoustic. Evans quite transforms the song, the main theme-and-variations becoming almost dance-like in character while the beat is characteristically incisive and lithe.

"For Nenetie" is for Bill Evans' wife. It is, he says, more of a gift than an attempt at a portrait. The melody came rather quickly, but then the real work began. "There was a danger," Evans recalls, "of the melody being too sweet, and so I worked on this with a great deal of control and

thought. The result, I hope, is a delicate balance of romanticism and discipline."

This conversation is for three pianos—two acoustic and one electric. Starting with a graceful rhapsodic feeling, the piece creates a lyrically meditative mood.

"Remembering The Rain" is another Evans original. The theme is the kind that evokes memories and desire, a sort of daydreaming—except that Evans' way of reflecting is never static. There is constant momentum, however softly powered, and here the mood breaks into sunlight—a kind of rainbow of time past and time present. Again, there are three pianos, two acoustic and one electric.

The wholly solo track is "Reflections In D," a Duke Ellington composition that Evans first heard on a Tony Bennett recording. So far as Bill knows, it was a comparatively obscure work of Duke's. "I can't imagine anything this beautiful," he says, "not being better known if it had been around for a long time." This piece, too, got Bill to think about the need to discipline the romantic impulse. "Jazz is great for doing that," he points out, "because the beat itself is a disciplining element. So is the outgoing nature of what you have to do as a jazz musician—even if you're not especially outgoing yourself. And then there's the forceful nature of jazz itself, which acts as a preventative to sentimentality."

Bill's capacity to renew, and indeed transform, a standard is intriguingly evident in "Nobody Else But Me." Here too, it's pleurably instructive to hear how he broadens and deepens the scope of a song, shifting tempos, changing shadings—all with a precision of design that nonetheless flows with feeling. There are two pianos—acoustic and electric.

"Song For Helen" is an original dedicated to the protean Helen Keane, the most accomplished of all jazz managers, who has been with Bill for more than 16 years. (The sixteenth anniversary took place in October, 1977.) In addition to her redoubtable efficiency and intelligence in business affairs, Helen is an authoritative record producer, and, for that matter, can function with swift skill as the engineer.

"This song," says Evans, "is based on a very simple three-note figure, and its shape only changes twice." But listen to what he builds on that spare foundation. "It's different than any tune I've done until now," he adds, "and I accomplished what I wanted to." "Song For Helen" is,



I believe, one of the loveliest, spring-like of all Evans' compositions and thereby does Helen Keane justice. There are three pianos—two acoustic and one electric.

"Maxine" is Bill's eleven-year-old stepdaughter. The song, a waltz, has been performed by Bill on a CBS-TV *Camera Three* program devoted to children's stories by e.e. cummings.

"I wanted to embody Maxine's spirit," Evans explains. "She's happy, full of life. The song has that spirit. It meanders a little, goes through a few channels, and ends playfully." Again, two acoustic pianos and one electric.

"After You" is a somewhat rare Cole Porter piece to which Bill was introduced by a British friend, pianist-arranger Pat Smythe. "The melody line," Bill notes, "is unique and unusually graceful. Listen to the way the phrases end, each time climbing up farther. It's masterful." And clearly, it's a song eminently suited to the quicksilver part of Evans' sensibility. There are two pianos, both acoustic.

Bill, who is one of the more demandingly self-critical musicians I've known, was pleased with these new frontiers in self-conversations. "This really is the essence of me," he says. "And there's so much you can do within this compass. For instance, it's a kick to build orchestral textures—where they fit in. And you can move freely between keys and moods."

Always, whether in these settings or any other, Bill works toward getting that feeling toward the keyboard which, as he once told critic-musician Len Lyons, "will allow you to translate any emotional utterance into the piano. And the more you express yourself through your instrument, the more identifiable your touch becomes because you're able to put more of yourself, your personal quality, into the instrument."

Bill certainly has come to the point at which he does indeed put himself, the very essence of himself, into the piano. And because that self has so much to say, Bill transcends categories and periods.

"I'm not so concerned with breaking barriers," he emphasizes, "because I find things that are good are good, and things that aren't just aren't." Bill is, after all, his own category by now. He never did bend to any winds of fashion, and he surely doesn't have to now—because he is that good.

—Nat Hentoff, 1978

1. Song For Helen (7:46)

(Bill Evans) Ludlow Music Inc., BMI

Acoustic & Electric Keyboards: Bill Evans

Produced by Helen Keane

2. Nobody Else But Me (4:34)

(Andrew Sterling, Bartley Costello)
Harms Inc., ASCAP

Recorded & Mixed by Frank Laico

Recorded at Columbia 30th Street
Studio, New York

January 26, 27, 28 and 30;

February 13, 14, 15 and 16, 1978

3. Maxine (4:38)

(Bill Evans) Ludlow Music Inc., BMI

Digital Mastering by Lee Herschberg

5. I Love My Wife (6:41)

(Cy Coleman, Michael Stewart)
Notable Music Co., Inc., ASCAP

Drawings: John Van Hamersveld

Art Direction: John Cabalka

Design: Brad Kanawyer

6. Remembering The Rain (4:26)

(Bill Evans) Ludlow Music Inc., BMI

First released in 1978

7. After You (3:37)

(Cole Porter) Harms Inc., ASCAP

8. Reflections In D (7:01)

(Duke Ellington) Duke Ellington Music, ASCAP

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Tracks 1, 3, 4 & 6 BMI
Tracks 2, 5, 7 & 8 ASCAP

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